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Claude Martin, Blanche Le Bihan

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Familialist option of the french Work/family balance policies: elements for a discussion

Claude Martin, directeur de recherche CNRS, CRAPE-university of Rennes 1
Blanche Youinou-Le Bihan, researcher LAPSS/ENSP

Work/family balance (WFB) debates and policies in France appear in a paradoxical context. In this country where the fertility rate is the highest in Europe (2 children per woman in 2006), where almost 60% of the women between 15 and 64 are on the labour market, mainly in full-time jobs, where childcare services and pre-schools offer a large panel of formal childcare arrangements, the level of stress and pressure that parents are facing in terms of WFB is still very high, as stated by a recent comparative research conducted by Rosemary Crompton (2006). To explain this paradox of the negative WFB in the French context, Crompton insists on the following factor: the very unequal division of domestic and caring tasks between genders, what she called “gender traditionalism”. “Despite a long history of state support for working mothers and family directed benefits, both gender stereotyping in respect of employment, and the domestic division of labour, are more conventional (or traditional) in France than might be expected” (Crompton, 2006, p. 132). H el ene P erivier defends a similar argument when she considers that it exists in France “un statu quo in egalitaire”¹.

This hypothesis of a French traditionalism or conservatism, as far as family and family policies are concerned, needs probably to be demonstrated. For example, it is difficult to assess what could be the main source of this negative WFB, stress and tensions in French households, analysed by R. Crompton. Is the French conservatism the main factor? Why don’t we consider the impact of the labour market transformation, which may explain this strong tension between work and family life? As a matter of fact, these tensions, stress and pressure that parents are facing in their daily life may have much to do with a global degradation of the labour market.

¹ . Considering that the French parental leave is used by women in 98% of the cases, H el ene P erivier considers: “The unequal statu quo is considered as the result of a ‘free choice’ of women who stops momentarily or definitely their activity or reduces their working time. The ‘free choice’ paradigm is not credible. And if the unequal situation which persists on the labour market was the result of a discrimination against women” (P erivier, 2007, p. 76).

Degradation of the labour market: a source of considerable tensions in households

As Pierre Concialdi recently stated: “From the beginning of the 80s, the temporary employments or part-time jobs increased drastically: 5 times more temp jobs, 4 times more fixed term contracts (‘Contrat à durée déterminée’), 3 times more training (‘stages’) or ‘emplois aidés’ (‘protected’ jobs), and more than the double of people concerned by underemployment. In all, the number of precarious employments increased by 2,5 millions between 1983 and 2005, which represent more than 60% of the new salaried jobs on the period (4 millions)” (Concialdi, 2006, p. 20). If we consider the situation in 2003, precarious jobs concern as a all about 4 millions people: 1,118,000 underemployed on part-time jobs; 473,000 in temporary jobs; 268,000 apprentices; 1,604,000 on fixed term contracts; 506,000 trainees and on “protected jobs” (‘emplois aidés’). This population represents 16% of the people on the labour market. And if we add to this precarious group, the unemployed (2,656,000 people at that time, which represent about 10% of the active population), the “*précariat*”² (Castel, 2006) concerns 6,6 millions people (see also Castel et al, 1997). And the picture is still much more negative, if we go beyond the BIT definition of unemployment (which is very restricted), and accept to take into consideration the “discouraged” unemployed people (760,000 people in which 56% of women in 2001) or the “unavailable” unemployed, who can’t take immediately a job mainly because of caring responsibilities (220,000, in which 67% of women) or the unemployed who were working more than one hour during the previous week of the employment inquiry which means that they are excluded of the statistics (994,000 people in which 60% of women) (Maruani, 2006)³. In this global trend of degradation of the labour market, the more vulnerable are more concerned: young people, women and of course, lone mothers who cumulate the difficulties.

Florence Jany-Catrice explains also that the major part of the new jobs created during the 90’s is non-qualified (more 6% per year between 1994 and 2002). In 2003, these jobs represented 5,3 millions of employments, knowing that 80% of them were occupied by women, in which half were working part-time, mainly non-desired part-

² . “We can call ‘*précariat*’ this condition under which precariousness becomes a proper level of the organisation of labour” (Castel, 2006, p 422).

³ . “Number of women are escaping from any registration of unemployment, because they are ‘naturally’ trapped in the specific female and socially invisible form of privation of employment: housewives, erased figure of the thinking about unemployment’ (Maruani, 2006, p. 409).

time. 40% of these jobs were paid less than half of the median salary. These employees have also the more constraining conditions of work, mostly incompatible with family and parental responsibilities (fragmented hours of work, work late in the evenings or very early in the mornings, week-ends, etc.).

Taking these elements into account, it is certainly difficult to say that the main factor to explain a difficult WFB in France could be the “traditionalism” or the familialist option of the French decision makers and citizens. Nevertheless, this degradation of the labour market may go hand in hand with a certain form of resistance of the French debate to face this new context.

The French familialism may have three main expressions:

- first, a familialist attitude of the population, as a cultural model (Pfau-Effinger, 2006)
- second, a familialist impact of the measures and policies that have been recently adopted and implemented
- last, a familialist rhetoric at the political level, in their main ideas and arguments concerning family issues.

Even if it is out of the scope of this paper to prove the persistence of this familialist option, we would like to develop some arguments on the basis of two main types of material: the French childcare policy measures and their impact during the past five years, on one side, and the main arguments and ideas developed in the political debate, either by politicians at the occasion of the Presidential campaign or in some recent official reports.

French family policy: a long incrementalist tradition coming from a familialist / natalist root

French family policy is generally considered as one of the most explicit and intensive one in Europe. It is even stated that the « family issue » could be the basis of the French social security system, just as poverty was a cornerstone of the Anglo-Saxon *Welfare State* and workers' status that of Germany's *Sozial Staat* (Merrien, 1990). Family benefits have even been considered as an extension of the salary towards households and, in a way, as one of the main pillars of the French social welfare system (Friot, 1998). Childhood has been considered quite early in France as a “common good” and a source of human capital, mainly because of the demographic challenge that this country was facing at the beginning of the 20th century. The low level of fertility during the 19th century and the trauma of the 1st World War explain

strong pro-natalism in France⁴. All the conditions were satisfied at the beginning of the 20th century to promote family and fertility as public concerns: First of all, a strong public debate, confronting different traditions of thinking (familialism, natalism and hygienism, libertarian movements); second, a public issue: this demographic challenge; third, social movements to promote family institution and fertility (recognized as social partners by the State with the Loi Gounot in 1942), and fourth, some experimentation in French public family policy (family premium in patriarchal industries and for civil servants at the end of the 19th century; institution of mutual aid funds: “les caisses de compensation”). These different elements make possible the “décrets-lois” of 1938 and 1939, institutionalising French family policy as pro-natalist policy. Even the period of Vichy government didn’t affect fundamentally this basic pro-natalist policy, despite the strengthening of a familist ideology. The French Social security Act in 1946 finalized this institutionalization process, by creating a “family branch” of our Bismarckian Welfare State. Then, family policy goals moved clearly from the end of the Third Republic (Code de la famille de 1939) until the 80s, from a natalist perspective, towards a distributive (universal and horizontal) and then redistributive (selective and vertical) perspective. Looking backwards, it is tempting to consider clear breaks in this story. To simplify, we could distinguish four main periods:

- . 1945-1965: the French family policy “Golden Age”, with strong incentives to promote fertility and compensate the cost of children. This is the time of a universal and intense family policy, which represented in the mid-50s more than half of social security expenditures;

- . 1965-1975: the “women’s rights” revolution, with a lot of fundamental reforms of Civil Law concerning marriage (“réforme des régimes matrimoniaux” in 1965), parental rights (autorité parentale) (1970), filiation (1972), divorce (1975), sexuality (1975, abortion);

- . 1975-1985: Equity issue, with the “rediscovery of poverty in a rich country” as Lionel Stoléru (1977) stated, and the development of the means-testing in family allowances.

- . 1985-2000: regulating unemployment and facilitating conciliation between work and family responsibilities with childcare policy measures.

The distinction between these different periods doesn’t necessarily indicate real turning points, but rather a progressive reframing of family policy goals and a process of cumulative change. We suggest these different phases to indicate that new social problems were identified, new public debates were occurring, knowing at the same time that the previous objectives were still active when new ones were promoted. So it is possible to identify nowadays some family policy measures which tend to promote fertility, but at the same time some others which promote more equality between genders; others which try to reduce social and economic inequalities and some whose implicit objective is to regulate the labour market and to develop female’s employment. In that sense, change in the family policy sector is typically incremental. The “print of origin” doesn’t disappear and the new objectives are piled up on the old ones. So, it may be quite artificial to argue that we can identify real turning points.

⁴ . In the mid-30s the number of deaths was higher than the number of lived births.

A Familialist cultural model about the “good childhood” and the “good mother” or a “no-choice” for women?

To describe the ambiguous position of France in the comparative researches about Welfare, childcare, family policy, etc, we could consider France as the more Nordic southern country. The importance of the formal childcare offer (with the central role of pre-schools where almost 100% of the children between 3 and 6 years old are cared for and almost 35% of the 2 to 3 year olds) and the level of female employment in full-time jobs justify this idea. Nevertheless, the French stereotype of mothers who claimed for public services to develop their professional career is too simple. In fact, during a standard week, from Monday to Friday, 2/3 of the under 3's are mainly cared for by their parents; 18% by a childminder, 8% in a crèche, 4% by grand-parents. This means that parents are still globally the main childcare provider (Ruault, Daniel, 2003). Even when both parents are working full time, they still represent the main carer for 30% of their under 3 children (62% of them are cared for with a paid childcare arrangement). For the 3-6 year olds, the main childcare solution during a normal week is of course school. But when they are not in school, these children are also mainly cared for by their parents.

What does it mean? It is difficult to give a definitive answer to such a question. Is it a real choice for parents? The fact that they seem to cope with this double investment - work and family responsibilities- doesn't mean that they have no needs of childcare alternatives. We can just discuss the following idea: In France, most part of the population considers that the best quality of care is guaranteed by the parents themselves, completed by some other professional carers. This attitude means that parents try to combine formal and informal resources in their care arrangements, even if this means many interventions (one or the other parent, grand-parents, friends, school, childminders, crèches, baby-sitters).

Here, we can mention the “attitudes towards the well-being of pre-school children and wages work of mothers” (ISSP, 2002). In this inquiry (see Pfau-Effinger, 2006), France is in an intermediary position between the “traditional” countries where a majority of people considers that “a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works” (Austria: 64,6%; Switzerland: 58,9; Poland: 56,8%; West Germany: 55,6%; Spain: 52,2%) and the countries where this opinion concerns a minority (Sweden: 23,7%; Denmark: 31,4%; East Germany: 32,7%; Great Britain: 38,4%). In France, 42,4% of the people agree with this statement, showing that even if work is considered

as crucial for women independence (for 80% of the people), it comes in contradiction with the negative impact this professional insertion may have for the children. This contradiction may explain the tension, the stress that these women have to face when they want at the same time to care for their children themselves and to work on the labour market. Doing both means tensions, stress, running and pressure. If we add to this contradiction two facts - the high French level of fertility (about two children per women) and the gendered division of domestic and caring tasks which is still very unequal (they spend about two times more time for these tasks than men) -, it is possible to explain the difficult WFB in the French context.

But what is the role of the family policy developed in France in the construction of this cultural model? Comparing the situation in the different European countries, the question could seem paradoxical. Indeed, if one considers the variety of childcare care services existing and the political measures developed in the last decade, France appears closer to the nordic countries than to the southern countries. And the main political objective seems to be that of both facilitating work/life balance (by the development of childcare facilities) and giving families the choice between caring and working. As from three years old most of the children are at school, the question is that of the 0-3 years old. The most important reform was the creation of the Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant (PAJE) in 2004. The objective was to introduce a unique system, replacing the five existing allowances⁵, but also to maintain the diversity of the solutions offered, giving parents the choice to organise their every day work/life balance.

The PAJE is described as a two levels' system (Report of the Centre d'analyse stratégique, 2007). First, the basis, which includes a flat rate birth benefit of 840 € and a means tested benefit allocated each month to parents until the child is three years old. Second a flexible system which varies according to the type of care arrangement chosen by the family. It proposes three solutions:

- An allowance to reduce the costs of childcare for parents who carry on their professional activity (the "complément du mode de garde" CMG). It is used to cover part of the wage paid to a childminder (assistante maternelle) or a person who cares for the children at home. It is means tested and varies according to the number and the age of the children.

⁵ The APJE (allocation pour jeune enfant), the APE (allocation parental d'éducation, the AFEAMA (aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle agréée), the AGED (allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile), the AAD (allocation d'adoption).

- A parental leave (“complément du libre choix d’activité” CLCA) for parents who choose to care for their children. It can be paid from the first child for a period of six month, and from the second child until the child is 3 years old.
- Since July 2006, a new configuration of parental leave has been created (“compléments optionnel du libre choix d’activité”) which enables parents to take a shorter leave, better paid. But this possibility only exists from the third child.

Moreover, when the parental leave is used to reduce the parent’s professional activity, it can be combined with the allowance paying part of the cost of childcare (CMG).

In practice, the PAJE reform, which includes both childcare allowances and a parental leave system, has introduced many inequalities and many criticisms have developed, showing that the parental leave existing in France is mainly taken by low income mothers. Indeed, the allowance is paid to parents who choose to stop or reduce their activity to care for their child or children. This possibility exists up to the three years of the child. It concerns 392 000 recipients in 2006, to which must be added the 180 000 recipients who receive the ancient parental leave (Allocation parentale d’éducation, APE). 97% of these recipients are women. (Berger, Chauffaut, Olm, Simon, 2006).

But, as it is flat rate (more or less half the minimum salary) and not linked to the level of wage of the parent, in couples, it is mostly adopted by women who usually have a lower income than their spouse. Moreover, it is adopted by low income mothers, for whom it is more economically advantageous to stop their professional activity and stay at home, than to cope with work/life conciliation difficulties and organise a care arrangement and by unemployed mothers (Fagnani, 1996). Therefore, many critics have arisen, accusing the French parental leave to be a poverty trap for low income and educated mothers (Méda, Périvier, 2007). The statistics show that the recipients receiving full parental leave are more often employees (Berget et alii, op. cit.).

The political rhetoric: between familialism and the social investment strategy (tradition and modernity)

Since the last Presidential election in 2001, the right wing obtained a large majority and many issues gave rise to political reinvestment and confrontation. This has been the

case, for example, for family issues (private life, marriage, consequences of divorce, parental responsibilities, homosexual parenting, etc.). This political reinvestment means that some traditional arguments are resurfacing, such as the necessity to promote the family as an institution, marriage as the normal family structure and the need to fight against parental irresponsibility. Political and media discourses about insecurity and delinquency intensified greatly during the 2002 Presidential campaign and afterwards. Many of these political and media discourses insisted on the culpability of some parents, charging that they are unable to assume their roles (Martin, 2003).

Compared to what happened in the previous decades (1985-2001) where two main arguments were dominant to frame family policy reforms: “equity and the necessity to support the less affluent”, or “using family policy as a tool to promote employment”, the last five years are characterized by two dominant ideas: first, the need for the state to protect and promote family as a main institution; second, the necessity to invest in childhood, which corresponds to the European “social investment strategy” rhetoric.

Every political actors make different combinations of these two arguments in order to be both modern and traditionalist.

First argument: “*Family is the basic institution of society*”.

From that perspective, the role of the government is to promote universal norms and to restore the family as an institution. This rhetoric relies on the fact that public opinion considers family as a central preoccupation. French citizens primarily expect to succeed in their family lives and see such success as the main condition for happiness.

Discours du Premier ministre, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, (avril 2003):
« La famille, c’est le lieu de la première des libertés, de l’éducation, c’est une communauté naturelle nécessaire, le lieu de vie où chacun peut retrouver son identité... Sa préservation, face aux agressions de ceux qui cherchent à asservir l’individu, est un devoir pour tout gouvernement ».

At the same time, the family is also considered as the main factor in explaining social problems (violence, delinquency, drug abuse, etc.). The positive aspect is that defending and protecting the family institution is seen as a public responsibility, which means that the government has to define universal norms (in Civil Law), and, in particular, a “policy of marriage”. The negative aspect is that the government has to define a “police des familles” (to use the expression of Jacques Donzelot [1977]), which means that it has to control and punish family’s irresponsibility and deviance.

This first position has clearly been adopted in two recent official reports:

- the first one, published by the Conseil d'analyse économique in May 2005 by Michel Godet and Evelyne Sullerot (2005),

One example of this normative attitude appears in this report about the consequences of divorce on children, in the following terms: “La société devrait intervenir au moins autant sur la conduite des familles qu’elle le fait pour la conduite automobile, car les blessés de la route familiale ne comptent pas moins que ceux de la route classique: ils supposent les mêmes politiques de prévention et de sanction que pour les chauffards... Les blessés de la route sociale sont d’abord des blessés de la route familiale. La cicatrice de la famille mal vécue se ferme d’autant moins qu’elle n’est pas reconnue.

- the second one, published by a Parliamentary commission in January 2006 and titled: “*Children first. 100 propositions to place child’s interest at the chore of family law*” (Bloche & Péresse, 2006).

In this report, the split between left- and right-wing members of the Commission seems clear. Patrick Bloche, the socialist President of that commission, decided to express his disagreement in the foreword of the report in the following terms: “I don’t share either the analysis of the report about the evolution of our society, or the juridical consequences that it proposes... When it sets out changes, it is only to regret them immediately. The mission was supposed to see the society as it is, not as it imagines it. I am afraid that the majority of its members preferred to see it as they wanted it, because of their attachment to the traditional family model – a father and a mother linked by marriage, living together with their children – a model whose erosion they deplore... Marriage is presented as the only appropriate arrangement for a couple to be able to provide security for its children... The defence of children’s rights is used to maintain inequality between couples.” (op. cit., p. 4).

Looking at the propositions of this report, it looks as if France was going to adopt a general policy defending or promoting marriage (as it has been done in the United States during the Georges Bush’s presidency) as the best way to support families. Nevertheless, as Andrew Cherlin underlined recently: “a family policy that relies too heavily on marriage will not help the many children destined to live in single parent and cohabiting-parent families – many of them economically disadvantaged – for some or all of their formative years. Only assistance directed to needy families, regardless of their household structure, will reach them” (Cherlin, 2005, p. 50).

Second argument: *to define an investment strategy as a policy of childhood.*

This argument corresponds to the “social investment strategy” promoted by the European Commission. The goal consists in investing in childhood and giving priority to prevention, to avoid producing future social problems that will overburden welfare policies. To invest in childhood, in this social capital, in the future workers, means to give priority to good childcare services, better education, good socialization, primary

and secondary, but also investing in health, housing and to enhance the level of income of households by promoting the development of bi-active couples⁶.

This type of argument based on a social investment strategy is developed in the Godet and Sullerot's official report, published in May 2005, which suggests some reform of family policy in order to promote fertility (Godet & Sullerot, 2005). For Michel Godet, the priority is to bring Europeans and, in particular, French citizens, back to work. He tried to demonstrate on the basis of OCDE data, that in the past 25 years, a gap of around one point in the annual average economic growth between Europe and the USA is due to the less dynamic demography of Europe. He also insists on the fact that France is the country whose inhabitants work least per year. According to his estimate, an American citizen works on average 46% more than a French citizen; a German citizen, 12% more; a Spanish citizen, 23% more; and a British citizen, 32% more.

In the perspective of these authors, a better WFB is necessary, not only because of the consequences on family daily life and welfare, not only because of the negative impact of these tensions in terms of health, but also in strict economic terms. A negative WFB has a cost for the Nation:

“Ces tensions détériorent non seulement la qualité de la vie familiale et la santé de ceux qui en sont victimes, mais se répercutent aussi sur le travail: retards, absentéisme, démobilisation, baisse de la productivité, etc. Le manque de conciliation représente ainsi un coût non négligeable. Certains pays, comme le Canada se sont accordés à analyser ce coût (Duxbury et alii, 1999). Selon cette étude, les coûts en soins de santé sont d'environ 6 milliards de dollars par année et le conflit travail-famille coûte aux entreprises canadiennes à peu près 2,7 milliards de dollars en temps perdu à cause des absences de travail –sans compter les coûts indirects liés par exemple au remplacement de l'employé, à la baisse de productivité, etc. Les politiques « family-friendly » attribuant une part familiale dans la responsabilité sociale des entreprises répondent en partie au souci de limiter ces coûts » (Godet et Sullerot, 2005, p.97)

The “social investment strategy” reminds us of the 1930's and of the natalist arguments which have dominated the French social insurance system since it has been

⁶ Prevention has also another meaning: the detection and social control of undesirable behaviours and children. The last expression of this social control mode of thinking was the French controversy about a report published by the INSERM (Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale) about the disturbing behaviours of the 1- to 3-year old children (“les troubles de conduite”). This report, which was state-of-the-art with respect to the substantial (mainly American) academic literature (mainly in epidemiology) on the topic, summarized the main findings of research that followed cohorts of children in order to assess the predictability of adolescent delinquency in the behaviour of the 1-3-year-olds. On the basis of these conclusions, the Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced a project of a policy of early intervention in the nursery schools (“écoles maternelles”). Many academics and professionals immediately reacted against this project and different petitions are circulating at the moment. The popularity of the notion of parenthood in the recent public and political debate is an expression of this security issue in France. For a development, see Martin, 2003.

created. But today, this « rallying-cry » has a new European meaning. To face the challenge of social inequalities, Esping-Andersen (2002) is advocating a prevention strategy (investment in the child), rather than a curative strategy (passive adult-oriented social policies)⁷. Consequently, top-quality public childcare services should be developed on the one hand and, on the other, the employment of mothers should be promoted in order to insure better economic and social living conditions for their children and to avoid poverty. All things considered, childhood would constitute a “good investment” for the future through implementation of a dual strategy of prevention, aiming on the one hand at raising household incomes through the granting of family allowances and, on the other, at promoting female employment and double-income families through the development of childcare services.

Another official report, published in February 2007 by the Centre d’analyse stratégique, at the demand of the Prime minister Dominique de Villepin, to analyse the opportunity to develop a “service public de la petite enfance”, uses explicitly this “social investment” rhetoric.

“A lot of inquiries show that inequalities between children are already important when they begin preschools and that they are not going to reduce afterwards. By offering a good childcare service from the beginning, one can promote equality of chances... By facilitating the access to work for women, one can reduce poverty and give better opportunities to all children. It is clear that there are many individual and collective benefits linked to an important social investment in childhood.

Alors que l’Etat-providence est appelé à se tourner de plus en plus vers l’investissement social plutôt que vers la difficile réparation des situations d’inégalités, l’idée d’investir fortement dans le domaine de la petite enfance progresse partout dans le monde. Il apparaît de la sorte nécessaire en France de continuer à promouvoir une politique efficace et ambitieuse dans ce secteur ». (Centre d’analyse stratégique, Rapport sur le service public à la petite enfance. Février 2007, p. 6).

The “social investment strategy” is directly connected with the policies of social activation, which objective is to integrate the entire population into the labour market (Giddens, 1998). These strategies represent new priorities and measures for the restructuring of welfare regimes. In that perspective, women and children are considered on the basis of their maximum productivity potential: thus, women have to be included in the labour market and must be supported with high level childcare services. “By the de-familialization of women, an increased number of employed

⁷ . “Since the possibilities of employment and a professional career depend to an ever greater extent on the individual’s acquisition of learning skills, this must be taken as the starting point. The mobilisation and adaptation of the adult is realistic and profitable provided he or she is already in possession of a minimum of learning capacity... Policies that aim at guaranteeing a second chance are far more costly and far less efficient than those that aim at improving the well-being of the very young.” (Esping-Andersen, 2002, pp. 49 et 55) (see also Jenson, 2000)

women as well as a higher birth rate and prevention of poverty in households with children will be achieved” (Olk, 2006). Nevertheless, this economic rationality doesn’t mean that the main objective may be full individual citizenship (Lewis, 2006). As Olk suggests: “The central goal is not the strengthening of the power position of women vis-à-vis men, but women are important because of their economic potentiality, which can be activated by an intensified participation in the labour market. And with regard to children, it is not the creation of a ‘good childhood’ in the here and now, but rather mobilizing children as productive workers of the future. It is not the citizenship rights of women and children which are at the centre but the role of women and children as investment goods in a social investment regime...The child is not ‘being a citizen’, but rather a ‘citizen-in-becoming’. And the citizen status is reduced to the economic dimension of the productive citizen-worker-of-the-future, and weakens the political and social dimension of full citizenship.” (idem).

The development of this new welfare architecture, with the objective of enhancing the participation of both parents to the labour market, may lead to the obligation of these workers to accept any employment, even if it implies a deterioration of their living conditions and a decrease of the time spent with the children.

This difficulty explains why all the reports have a development about the necessity to help parents, and mainly mothers, to cope with their flexible and precarious working conditions⁸. The question of atypical working time is treated as a problem in both reports of the CAS (2005 and 2007)⁹.

Nevertheless, despite these converging arguments to defend the creation of a public service of childcare, the last CAS report doesn’t fulfil this proposition. It limits itself to suggest a unique “guichet” to accede to services, because of the complexity of the offer on a local basis.

If we look at the Presidential campaign and the candidates’ propositions, Ségolène Royal is the only one who engages herself to create such a “right” to a childcare solution for any citizen in the perspective of a real “public service of childcare”.

“Je crois possible et nécessaire de créer, notamment, un véritable service public de la petite enfance qui soulage les mères, allège la tâche des familles monoparentales et celle des femmes salariées, majoritairement abonnées aux petits salaires et aux contrats précaires (Discours de Rodez, 12 mai 2006). « le service public de la petite enfance sera créé. Il devra garantir à tous les parents le droit effectif à l’accueil et à la garde de leurs

⁸ . The development of atypical times of work is one of the challenges that parents are facing at the moment (for a development, see Le Bihan and Martin, 2005).

⁹ . See pages 99-100 in CAS (2005) and pages 22-23 in CAS (2007)

enfants de 2 mois à 3 ans. Je pense aux femmes peu qualifiées que le complément d'activité de libre choix incite à se retirer du marché du travail et qui une fois de retour, retrouvent des conditions d'emploi plus précaires qu'avant. » ('La France qui se bat, la France qui se relève. Discours de Strasbourg, 20 décembre 2006). Sur www.desirsdavenir.org)

« Pour réaliser l'égalité, il faut à la fois agir sur les représentations, faire évoluer les mentalités et les habitudes. C'est une question culturelle, symbolique et sociale... Elever des enfants et mener une carrière, c'est négocier en permanence avec sa culpabilité. C'est pourquoi j'ai mis au premier rang de mes propositions la création d'un service public de la petite enfance : la certitude d'un mode de garde dès la fin du congé de maternité est indispensable. Et puis, il faut aussi que cela bouge dans les familles et les couples ! Même si on apprécie les évolutions chez les jeunes parents, le partage des responsabilités domestiques et familiales n'est toujours pas équitable, ... ce sont toujours les femmes qui interrompent leur vie professionnelle ou la mettent en veilleuse pour se consacrer davantage aux enfants. J'ai créé le congé de paternité quand j'avais en charge le ministère de la famille, justement pour permettre aux pères de s'impliquer davantage. Je suis fière de cette mesure. Ce congé pour les pères était aussi une belle avancée pour les femmes. Mais il faut continuer, aller plus loin dans le partage et le soutien aux parents. Je n'accepte pas que pour les femmes, enfants et autonomie entrent en contradiction. » (« Le respect des femmes, c'est le condition de l'égalité », interview de Ségolène Royal dans *L'hebdo des socialistes*, n°438, samedi 3 mars 2007p. 9-10).

François Bayrou, (UDF central party's candidate), only enumerates measures like :

« Le développement de crèches d'entreprise, ainsi que de crèches collectives et familiales à horaires adaptés, l'organisation d'études surveillés pour les collégiens. Je propose de fractionner le congé parental pour que les parents puissent consacrer du temps à leurs enfants à tout moment de sa scolarité, jusqu'à 16 ans » (www.Bayrou.fr/propositions/enfance.html).

On the Nicolas Sarkozy's site, it is impossible to find any specific section to this type of issues, even if, on the contrary you can buy Tshirts and caps with the candidate's name and photography. His position on family issue and WFB are presented by his "porte-parole", Valérie Pécresse.

"Nous voulons permettre à tous les français d'avoir le nombre d'enfants qu'ils souhaitent. Cela nous conduit à proposer l'instauration d'un droit de l'enfant à être gardé qui serait opposable d'ici 2012. C'est-à-dire que d'ici la fin de la législature, nous nous engageons à proposer à chaque famille une solution de garde adaptée pour ses enfants, sachant que cette solution pourra être une crèche, mais aussi une crèche d'entreprise, un jardin d'enfants ou une assistante maternelle. Nous voulons ensuite aider les français dans leur tâche d'éducation et pour cela, nous proposons de généraliser les études dirigées, dans les collèges et les lycées, pour tous les enfants, afin de mettre fin à cette injustice criante qui est celle du soutien scolaire accessible uniquement aux plus riches. Nous voulons que dans la mission de l'éducation nationale il y ait cette mission de soutien scolaire. Cela permet aux parents de rentrer du travail en sachant que leurs enfants n'ont pas été livrés à eux-mêmes et qu'ils rentrent devoirs faits. Enfin, nous voulons favoriser les solidarités familiales par rapport à des solidarités plus socialisées qui sont plus impersonnelles et dans lesquelles l'affection a moins de place. » (<http://abonnes.lemonde.fr>) 05.02.07

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